

State of the City Address
Presented by Mayor Arthur S. "Sandy" Kirkindall
Thursday, April 28, 2005 in Council Chambers, 6-8:00 p.m.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining us for a special presentation in partnership with the City of Madison School Board of the State of the City and State of the Schools. I am honored to have Dr. Clark and Dr. Fowler here with me tonight to give you our assessment of where the City of Madison and its schools stand. More importantly, I'm pleased to have all of you here to learn how you can become active partners in our plan to make growth work for Madison and keep it a great place to live and raise a family.

Just over six months ago, I stood in this room, raised my right hand, and pledged a solemn oath of service to this City as its Mayor. I gave my word that I would do everything within my power to fulfill the promises of my campaign, and I take that commitment very seriously. It's a good thing, too, because from the comments, calls, and emails I've been getting, I can tell that the people of this City took me at my word and are holding me to it! Thanks to your feedback, I'm getting a clearer picture every day of what you expect from Madison and your city officials. And with help from City Council, the county and state representatives, and City staff, we're identifying and addressing the city's needs just as fast as we can pull together the right resources.

Before we get into the substance of this message, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to you, the residents of Madison, for entrusting me with the best job anyone could hope for. But even more than that, I thank you for giving me a great City Council to work with. This City is fortunate to have on its City Council some of the finest and most dedicated public officials I have ever known, and it is my honor to sit with them in this very room every two weeks to conduct the City's business. Our new Council members—Steve Haraway, Jerry Jennings, Tim Cowles, and Tommy Overcash—have settled into their new roles very well and formed a cohesive working relationship with Council President Bob Wagner and veteran Council members, Cynthia McCollum and President Pro-Tem Larry Vannoy. Bob Wagner's even-handed leadership has helped this Council become an effective force for guiding the future development of the City, and I am grateful for the Council's support as we move forward.

As you may have heard me say during the campaign, I'm a big believer in the concept of "MBWA"—Management by Walking Around. Since I first took office last October, I've had the opportunity to learn a great deal about our people and government by walking around, meeting folks, and seeing firsthand how things operate. Tonight, I'd like to share the benefit of that experience by taking you on a sort of walk through Madison to see what's been happening, how we're progressing on the goals set out during the campaign, and where we plan to go from here. As a 25-year NASA veteran, I'm a guy who tends to approach things logically, so let's start with the most basic needs of the city and work our way up from there.

An inescapable fact of life in Madison is rapid growth. On a typical walk around town, you'll see signs of both the growth that blesses us and the associated growing pains that plague us. Well-traveled roads are worn; traffic is heavier than we remember

it even a year ago; and new neighborhoods seem to be popping up overnight. Madison County is ranked third in the State of Alabama for population growth, and the City of Madison accounts for nearly half of that growth. That kind of growth is great, but uncontrolled growth can really hurt a city, too. In order to make growth work for Madison, we must build the infrastructure to support it.

Fortunately, we have the benefit of a dedicated team of professionals who are working closely together to improve Madison's infrastructure. An excellent example is the stoplight at Wall-Triana and Gillespie that helps ease the flow of traffic along one of Madison's main thoroughfares. That stoplight installation depended on the expertise and collaborative efforts of several departments, including Legal, Public Works, City Engineering, and the Police Department, which provided countless hours of traffic direction until the installation was completed. The stoplight on Hughes Road at Eastview by Bob Jones High School has similarly improved safety and traffic flow.

For those of you who struggle to make your way down Wall-Triana Highway during peak travel times, I have more good news. Work has already begun on desperately-needed improvements that will eventually culminate in the complete redesign of the Palmer / Front Street intersection in the heart of the Historic District. I know how difficult the road work has made some of your daily commutes, but I assure you that everyone is working together to see that the job is done right from start to finish, and that the end result will be well worth the temporary inconvenience.

While we're talking about infrastructure, let's stroll over to the Planning, Engineering, and Building (PEB) Department to get an idea of what we're facing in terms of continuing growth. The City of Madison becomes home to about 1700 new residents every year. We average around 600 new homes built each year, and—despite some folks' concerns—the recent increase in building permit fees has had no discernable effect on our residential growth rate. What it has impacted is who pays for growth. Before, the City lost money on every home that was built; the rate increase has actually made it possible for growth to start paying for itself. The same numbers of homes are being built, but the developers are paying for what the City once subsidized using your tax dollars. Thanks to the rate increase, those dollars can help pay for essential improvements to our infrastructure, the very improvements that keep Madison a desirable place to live.

We can't talk about infrastructure without taking a look at another critical need for city residents: water and sewer service. Although the City of Madison and the Water and Wastewater Board often work together to improve infrastructure, the Water Board is actually a separate entity from the City of Madison itself, with its own budget and separate operating funds. The Water Board enjoys major assets sufficient to service a city of fifty-eight thousand. Water and Wastewater Board assets include:

- A 6 million gallon per day (MGD) sewage treatment plant valued at \$22 million

- A 4 MGD drinking water production plant worth \$4.4 million
- An 8 MGD drinking water production plant worth \$11.4 million, and
- Three drinking water storage tanks with 12 million total gallons capacity

Expansion of the sewage treatment plant to 9 MGD is anticipated for the 2009 timeframe. This expansion will meet the City's needs at "buildout" or maximum population of 63,000. The 2004 fiscal year audit showed that "the board is well within its debt covenants and the more stringent policies and guidelines set by the Board". If necessary, the system can purchase water from the City of Huntsville and Harvest-Monrovia water systems in emergency situations. The average daily usage for the system for the past year was approximately 6 million gallons, and maximum daily usage was 7.8 million gallons.

In 2003, with operating revenues of \$8.4 million and expenses of \$7.6 million, the Water Board enjoyed an increase in net assets (or profit) of more than \$800 thousand. A year later, Water Board operating revenues totaled \$9.7 million, and expenses were \$8 million. With a profit of \$1.7 million last year, the Board now holds cash and cash equivalents totaling \$9.8 million.

Speaking of walking around town, I'd like to address a topic that I heard over and over again on doorsteps all over town during the campaign. Six months later, the hospital is still one of the hottest topics in town. For a firsthand look at the effort to get a hospital built in our City, we actually need to take our walking tour outside the city limits to Commissioner Dale Strong's office, and from there, on to Montgomery to shake Governor Riley's hand. I could spend this whole evening describing to you the dedication, hard work, and legal finagling that's already been invested in our push for adequate health care in our area, and I'd barely scratch the surface. Commissioner Strong has gone well above and beyond the call of duty advocating for a health care facility in Madison. With support from the City Council, my office, and many of our residents, Commissioner Strong has led the charge and encouraged others all the way up to the State level to get behind the idea and help make it happen sooner rather than later.

Those efforts are finally starting to pay off. On Thursday, April 7, 2005, the Statewide Healthcare Coordinating Council (SHCC) approved an additional 60-bed allocation for Madison County that would allow a hospital to be constructed in the City of Madison. With Governor Riley's signature on it, that last major hurdle was cleared. Madison will get its hospital, and the one important question remaining is "When?" This is where we all need to pull together to keep this process going. Our best advantage is public awareness of our overwhelming need for more accessible, quality health care. With lawyers for various interested parties pushing their clients' agendas, we must present a clear and unified position that the City of Madison needs and wants a hospital as soon as possible. So please show your support for Commissioner Strong, the City Council, and my office, as we push to bring Madison's hospital to life.

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Some other folks we ought to visit to talk about essential infrastructure are those who help ensure the safety and security of our City. We all know that the police and fire departments are there to deal with trouble that crops up, but I hope you've also had the opportunity to see how active our public safety officers are throughout the community, from serving as crossing guards and school patrols to participating in events like the Mayor's Cup Charity Basketball game. They also work closely with public safety agencies throughout our area, through reciprocal agreements with Huntsville; adoption of responsibility for regional Heavy Rescue; and continuous improvement of interdepartmental communications and response times. On a walkthrough of the 911 center, you can't help but be impressed with the professionalism and constant collaboration among various agencies to see that urgent needs are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner.

In addition to the public safety officers of the police, fire, and Emergency Management agencies, Madison enjoys the support of a top-notch Legal and Domestic Violence response team and an efficient Court system that's constantly working to balance the safety needs of our community with the drive to keep costs down and make the most of your tax dollars. The City of Madison also proudly supports the National Child Advocacy Center in Huntsville, which continues to realize Congressman Bud Cramer's vision of reaching out to at-risk children and their families.

Back at City Hall, I'm proud to say that your City officials are working together better than ever to keep things running smoothly in Madison. City Council recently approved an agreement with AlaTax to collect unpaid business license fees and update the database of local businesses to improve revenues. Recent increases in sales tax and license revenues will also help to improve our bottom line.

The big news over in Finance is that Madison has successfully maintained its high bond ratings with Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Services. The S&P AA rating and A-1 rating with Moody's are to the City what a good credit rating is to an individual. Those high bond ratings qualify the City of Madison for lower interest rates, which stretches your tax dollars on projects financed by the City. Additionally, streamlining of the City budget has brought the fund balance up to where it should be; although we still can't quite afford to implement major new projects, the budget is essentially balanced. The next challenge for the Finance Department is implementation of the Government Accounting Standard Board Statement Number 34 (GASB-34), which brings us into line with leading-edge accounting standards.

Finance's neighbors in the City Clerk's office are hard at work helping the County Commission and Board of Registrars carry out election reform measures. In cooperation with the City of Huntsville, the City of Madison is addressing problems that arose during recent elections, including poor access and excessive wait times at polling places, and confusing voting districts. When you walk by the City Clerk's office, you might also notice new Spanish-language signs, which are part of our new Workplace

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Spanish Program to reach out to the Hispanic community and make city services more accessible to a diverse population.

Making city government more accessible to the community is a major goal of my administration. While the Workplace Spanish Program improves accessibility of City services to the Hispanic community, the City's website facilitates communication and allows residents ready access to information on city projects and programs. Our IT department does an excellent job of maintaining the City website. After tonight's walking tour of Madison, I hope you'll visit the website for a virtual tour. One hot topic you ought to check out is the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

As you may recall, facilitating pedestrian traffic throughout Madison was a focal point of my campaign. As promised, when I became Mayor, I went right to work on a directive requiring all new development to incorporate sidewalks and bike paths. Part of my plan to make growth work for Madison is to build quality of life into our development plans; which is why the Capital Improvement Plan includes sidewalks and bike paths to provide safe commuting routes for children on their way to and from school; and to allow walkers, joggers, and bicycle-riders a means to enjoy the outdoors out of the way of street traffic. Several such projects include Eastview, the intersection of Dock Murphy and County Line Road, Bradford Farms and Gooch Lane, and Hughes Road from Old Madison Pike to Sturdivant. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our new City Engineer and the Planning, Engineering, and Building Department, all of these areas should have sidewalks and/or bike paths very soon.

In another part of the City, capital improvements to provide better traffic flow include upgrading and widening Balch Road from Browns Ferry to Highway 72, planned and partially funded by a Congressional appropriation from Bud Cramer and with support from the Alabama Department of Transportation. The Balch Road project should relieve traffic congestion on our main North-South corridors and accommodate nine thousand additional vehicles per day. A planned further extension of Balch Road south to Madison Boulevard could increase that traffic capacity to as many as twenty-two thousand vehicles per day. Not only are these plans designed to provide the necessary infrastructure for Madison's growth; with the aid of computer modeling programs, they also take into account the potential impact of growth and traffic patterns in surrounding communities.

Now, like everything else, Capital Improvements cost money. The City of Madison has to earn revenues to pay the bills and make necessary improvements, or our neighborhoods won't stay nice, and the City will go into decline. We also have to make sure our residents have access to the goods and services that maintain their quality of life. We do that with Economic Development initiatives.

When I first announced my candidacy for Mayor, I promised to work with City Council; the Chamber of Commerce; and various boards and committees to "bring a

greater variety of businesses to Madison". One of our greatest Economic Development needs is aggressive retail recruitment. The Madison Chamber of Commerce, City Council, and I have teamed up to develop a comprehensive Retail Recruitment strategy, utilizing a full-time Retail Recruiter to promote retail development. The Retail Recruiter's focus is on attracting shops that fit our lifestyles and interests, and that the local market will support. If upscale dining, quality clothing, and convenient shopping are what you want, we don't want you to have to leave Madison to find them.

In February, our Retail Recruiter and I traveled to Mobile to represent the City of Madison at the International Conference of Shopping Centers Expo. We set up a booth, led a discussion panel, and shook hands with representatives of other cities and various retail organizations in an effort to promote our City to the retail community. We've gotten some really positive feedback from folks who saw us there, and I'm continuing to pursue retail "targets of opportunity" as I go about City business to encourage retailers to consider Madison for their businesses.

A prominent feature of our Economic Development plan is the Shop Madison First initiative. I'm sure you've noticed the new "Entering/Leaving Madison" signs around town, which help clarify what businesses are or are not in Madison. Rumor has it that they're working. You'd be surprised how many times I've heard, "I didn't know that was in Madison," or "I thought I was shopping in Madison, but it's on the other side of the sign". There are more plans in the works to help people identify Madison businesses and recognize ways to spend their tax dollars in Madison.

Targeted incentives also help to encourage commercial development, and I would like to thank everyone who helped implement just such an incentive here in Madison. Water and sewer impact fees are now waived for new businesses, providing dramatic start-up cost savings to business owners and easing the process of establishing services in our City. That gives developers who might once have claimed it was too hard to build in Madison an excellent reason to take a second look at this City.

When people do look at this City, I want to make sure that what they see is not only functional and practical, but also visually appealing and fun. I'm proud to say that the Parks and Recreation Department, in cooperation with other departments and countless volunteers, is making remarkable strides toward that goal. In a mere 6 months, we've made improvements to more than 35 neighborhood parks; reconstructed Kids' Kingdom; maintained high athletic program participation; and successfully hosted several record-breaking special events. The groundwork has also begun on new athletic facilities and a Japanese Garden at Dublin Park.

Now, parks and recreation make Madison a great place to live, but I want to take just a moment to recognize the people who make City Hall a great place to work. Every organization depends on its Human Resources to get the job done, and our HR department really has a knack for recruiting, training, and retaining the right people to serve this community in City government. With over 1,200 job applicants last year, the

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City of Madison has the benefit of a truly quality workforce. Most are skilled professionals who have many years of experience, and who could choose to work anywhere, but have chosen public service. We are fortunate to have them. Through special events like the Veterans' Acknowledgment Ceremony and Employee Awards Luncheon, the HR department makes sure the exceptional people who serve this City know how much we appreciate their service.

In a city that takes pride in the quality education available to young people, it's also important to recognize academic excellence and provide scholarship incentives to our students. To that end, I'm pleased to be the first Mayor of Madison to offer the Mayor's Award for Scholastic Excellence. In cooperation with the schools and with City Council's approval, the Mayor's Award will recognize rising high school Seniors and middle school upperclassmen who demonstrate overall academic excellence and who particularly excel in one academic discipline. The establishment of this Award helps spotlight Madison's educational excellence and may improve our chances for positive outcomes when major economic decisions—like those being considered by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC)—are being made.

Before I introduce our school board representatives, I have one more thing to share with you. Several years ago, I volunteered to be a mentor for a group of 8th graders designing a City of the Future for an Engineers' Week competition. I thought that all my project management experience combined with their enthusiasm would produce a dynamite combination that would be guaranteed to win a blue ribbon. I quickly found out that we were not all focused on the same goal and that we had dramatically different approaches in mind to reach the goal. The team consisted of four 13 year-old boys. When I encouraged them to think outside the box, it took me a while to realize that 13 year-olds don't even know there is a box. One of the boys was primarily interested in impressing the girls parading down the hall, and the rest of the guys mainly wanted to play games with the design software we were supposed to use. All of them were more computer savvy than I was, and basically we didn't speak same the language or even have the same frame of reference. But after getting to know one another and assessing our strengths, we began to work together as a team, and we wound up winning a medal in the competition despite our rocky start.

In much the same way, our newly formed partnerships are starting to yield medal-winning results for this City. The City Council, Water Board, and my office are pulling together to bring new businesses to Madison and build the infrastructure we need so badly; and our joint efforts with the County Commission and the City of Huntsville, even though we have different frames of reference, have resulted in the rapid repaving of Slaughter Road and in the State's approval for 60 beds for a new hospital in Madison.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of our city is excellent. Madison is prosperous, clean, and safe. We are providing our children with recreational opportunities, a great education, and a safe environment in which to grow. And we are forging partnerships that will help us achieve even more. With about 12 more years of growth before we reach buildout, the City of Madison is at a crossroads. The choices we make now will

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determine whether our remaining years of growth will work against us and send the City into decline, or work for us and create a community we can be proud to call home. It has been said before, but it continues to be true: Madison's best days are still ahead, and I invite all of you to join us in hastening their arrival. You can get involved by shopping Madison first; communicating with your City Council representatives; attending City Council meetings; and participating in other City Boards and Committees. Each and every one of our citizens has something special to offer, and I hope you'll take the opportunity to share your talents with the city you call home.